Senior Nayaj Malino has distanced herself from conventional sports, into an exotic martial arts form called Jiu-Jitsu. Beginning her career freshman year, Nayaj has been training and competing in Jiu-Jitsu tournaments, or nagas, for almost four years.

The combat sport can be compared to wresting, and focuses on ground fighting especially grappling, for competition or self-defense.

She was first introduced to the art by her father, who also competes as well as coaches other pupils.

“My dad has been doing it for a long time. He travels to Atlanta almost every month to compete,” said Nayaj. While her father competes more regularly, Nayaj only competes in Charlotte based nagas, which are held about every sixth months.

The sport teaches that anyone of any size can bring down a taller, stronger opponent using leverage and the right technique. More than anything, this draws Nayaj to the sport most of all.

“You don’t have to be big in order to participate in the sport. Because I’m so small there aren’t usually other girls in my weight class and I’ll have to compete with much bigger people, but I can usually win through the techniques that I have been taught,” said Nayaj.

Even with years of practice, Nayaj remains only a white belt, the first rank of Jiu-Jitsu and other martial art forms. It will take her twenty five years in order to move through the ranking and achieve the iconic black belt, meaning the mastery of the art.

Jiu-Jitsu consists of many different wrestling holds that test both competitors endurance and physical limits on the body.

“The most demanding part about Jiu-Jitsu is knowing when to give in and give up. During competitions and even training sessions, a lot of people pass out and it can sometimes be very dangerous,” said Nayaj.

Nayaj remains devoted to the sport, but with practicing six days a week with three hours loing training sessions she has been tempted to quit the sport all together.

“With such long practices, it takes a lot of commitment and last year I was truly thinking about quitting. It takes a lot out of you, but it’s very rewarding,” said Nayaj.

Nayaj practices at Ballaltyne Kicks with twelve others and only two other girls in an intermediate class. She wishes to continue her love of the martial art and one day receive her black belt.